

ASPECTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS OF 1848-1849 IN SATU MARE COUNTY

Abstract: The revolutionary actions that took place in Satu Mare County in 1848 rallied the participation of the representatives of all ethnic groups: Romanians, Hungarians and Swabians. Their goals were related, in particular, to the peasant unrest of the period: emancipation from serfdom, the abolition of taxes, and the review of the urbarial regulations that had left the peasants with very little land. What is interesting about Satu Mare is that the events here did not fit the pattern of the 1848 revolutionary movement in Transylvania. The Romanian population here, concentrated only in certain regions, was solely influenced by the ideas propagated in the areas adjacent to the boundaries of Sătmar. Only in these localities did the uprising movements have a broader, national character. The Hungarian population became aware, in the spring of 1848, of the revolutionary principles and acted according to them. The revolt movements organized on large estates, particularly on the Károlyi domain, comprised not only the Hungarian population, but also the Swabians and the Romanians; these movements had been engendered by the discontent that the new agrarian law, passed by the Diet in Bratislava, had caused. It should be noted that on this estate, the Romanian population lived among the Hungarian and the Swabian communities, being strongly influenced by them. That is why the events from the spring of 1848, in which the Romanians from the Károlyi estate were involved, had a strong social character. This was reinforced by the lack of Romanian elites that might have assumed the role of leaders, supporting and coordinating the Romanians.

Keywords: county, national guard, uprising, authorities.

The revolutionary movements that swept across Europe in 1848 did not spare the regions of Satu Mare County, not only the Hungarian population, but also the Romanians and the Swabians becoming actively involved in them, according to their own ideals and interests. Throughout time, the 1848 events in Satu Mare have been approached from two perspectives, Hungarian and Romanian, each using certain sources only partially. Specifically, Hungarian historiography focuses on one category of sources, those providing information about the Hungarian national movement, while Romanian historiography delves into another series of documents, on the revolutionary actions of the Romanian population. Each of them touches upon the other aspects merely tangentially, depending solely on the entwinement of those events. For these reasons, we have considered it necessary to review the events that occurred in the region of Sătmar, addressing both perspectives and reconstructing the timeline of those actions.

We must emphasize that, in the county of Satu Mare, just like in entire Transylvania, the actions of the Romanian population from 1848-1849 had a distinctly social character. This was due to several factors; we shall list only those that we consider most important, namely the discontent aroused by the agrarian law passed by the Diet of Bratislava on 18 March 1848 and the absence of an elite that might have derived from among the Romanian population, an elite willing to align itself with the peasantry in order to find solutions to the social and national issues.

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In the beginning, the revolutionary spirit animated the inhabitants from the urban area of Satu Mare. On 24 March, an extraordinary public assembly was held in Baia Mare, where the 12 points of the Hungarian revolutionary program adopted in Pest were accepted, and the decision to organize the local guards was reached. On 8 April, another assembly was convened to determine the composition of the guards' command. It appears that errors marred the votes counted for the election of the command, and thus its composition was detrimental to the miners and favorable to the townspeople. A conflict arose between the two parties, and the townspeople escaped only by fleeing. This was the only episode of the upheaval in the region, but the permanent distrust caused by the incident from the elections determined, throughout the duration of the actions from the years 1848-1849, the persistence of strained relations between the miners and the authorities, which were dominated by foreign elements, subordinated not to the town, but directly to the Royal Chamber.²

On 24 March, in Carei, by way of celebrating the Hungarian national holiday, there was held a demonstration, accompanied by music and an artistic performance.

At the county assembly held on 29 March 1848, Gabányi Sándor, Vice-Comes of Satu Mare County, officially made known the revolutionary events in Budapest and the new laws adopted by the Hungarian Parliament about the abolition of the serfs' obligations. It was decided that a representative body of the comital assembly should travel from village to village, throughout the county, and notify the inhabitants of the provisions of the Diet in Bratislava, on the one hand attempting thus to avoid the emergence of any misunderstandings, and on the other hand, aiming to becalm the spirits that had been showing signs of agitation. On this occasion, the decision was reached to establish the local guards, meant to protect the peace and welfare of the county. The sum of 20,000 forints was voted for providing the guards with weapons, but the amount was too small to ensure the necessary armament.

On 12 August 1848, the order was received that the noble families should donate all the weapons they owned, being allowed to keep only one hunting rifle a family, which could be used for defense. It was decided that a conscription should be drawn up, so as to have a clear record of those holding hunting rifles, and the Károlyi and Vécsey families were requested to donate the cannons they had kept since Rákóczi's revolution. Until the county guards were supplied with firearms, they were equipped with bats and straightened scythes.³

The role of the local national guards was to protect the people's life and property, as well as to maintain peace and internal order. The law allowed them to act outside the localities from which their members had been recruited or outside the county, but their main role was to keep the order in the recruitment area. After the rebellion of the Serbs and the successful use of the local guards for suppressing it, their efficiency and importance became fully apparent. For this reason, and also because there was no well-maintained national army, on 13 August 1848, Prime Minister Batthyány

² Balogh Béla, "Társadalmi és nemzetiségi mozgalmak Szatmár és Máramaros megyékben valamint Kővár vidékén 1848-ban," in Takács Péter (ed.), *Forradalom és szabadságharc a Felső-Tisza vidékén*, Nyíregyháza: Periférián Alapítvány, 1998, p. 13.

³ Borovszky Samu, *Szatmár vármegye*, Budapest: Országos Monográfia Társaság, 1910, p. 519.

issued a new decree whereby he ordered the county authorities to form, in addition to the local guards, mobile guards that could also act outside the county.⁴ Their members had to be selected, on a voluntary basis, from among the young people who were willing to participate, whenever needed, for as long as needed, in all the actions of the guard. They received the same pay as the members of the military, which meant raising the living standards for the families of the poor men who joined the guard. Another provision of this decree referred to the endowment of these guards. The resolution stipulated the obligation to ensure the most efficient type of weapons that were made available to the members of the mobile guards. In the county of Satu Mare, the implementation of the provisions of this decree encountered numerous difficulties during the initial phase, due to the fact that the young intellectuals and newly freed serfs did not want to enlist. However by the beginning of September, the organization of a mobile guard comprising 300 people had successfully taken place, its captain being Rajnagl Richárd.⁵

Regarding the local national guards, it should be noted that their organization in the Sătmár region had begun before the issuance of the order that regulated this action. Sixteen commissions coordinated by the district judge were sent to the localities in Satu Mare to take down the names of the people who could join the local guard. Every person who had a house or land worth 200 forints, at least half a *sesie* [land plot] or a fortune worth 100 forints. From among these people, those who were forced to join the local guard included every man aged between 20 and 50 years. The rules on the organization of these military units attempted to avoid the conscription of the poor, for fear of riots. There was the suspicion that if the latter received weapons, they would turn fully armed against the nobles. Thus, the commissions had to draw up lists of the names, age, occupation and wealth on the basis of which the men were entitled to join the guard. The study of these lists reveals that the provisions concerning wealth were not always respected, and that peasants who lacked the necessary wealth were also recruited. Besides these, there were also petty nobles, intellectuals (mainly priests), traders and artisans, including a few Jews.⁶ The fact that the local guards from Satu Mare County accepted the inclusion of Jews is an interesting aspect because from the very beginning of the organization of the guards, the Jewish population had represented a problem: they did not have full rights in society, being merely tolerated. Only in June 1849 was there a law signed that elevated the Jewish religion among the accepted religions.⁷ However, many Jews were accepted among the local guards, the ones in Satu Mare representing eloquent examples; this prompted the organization of anti-Semitic actions in Budapest. After their annihilation, the Hungarian government decided that Jews should no longer be accepted as members of these guards.

⁴ Hermann Róbert, *A nemzetőrség és a honvédség 1848-1949*, Budapest: Hermann Róbert, 1998, p. 16.

⁵ Bene János, "Nemzetőrség szervezése Szatmár vármegyében 1948-ban," in Farkas József- Zoltán Ujváry (ed.), *Történelem, régészet, néprajz: Tanulmányok Farkas József tiszteletére*, Debrecen: Ethnika Alapítvány, 1991, p. 79.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

⁷ Hermann Róbert, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

The major towns in Satu Mare County organized their own local national guards. Thus, the local national guard from Carei included 775 members, only some of them having weapons. In Baia Mare, 700 people were members of the local national guard. There were 870 different firearms available to them, at the town warehouse, at the office of the mines and with private owners. In the town of Satu Mare, the establishment of the local national guard was successful. The town council voted a large sum for the supply of rifles and cannons they had ordered from Belgium. For this reason, there was a rivalry between the county and the town authorities. When the ordered rifles were on their way to Satu Mare, passing by the town of Carei, the county guard attacked the convoy and looted the weapons, which came thus to be used by it and not by the Satu Mare town guard. The conflict between the two parties ended according to the proverb "Two dogs strive for a bone and a third runs away with it," because the mobile national guard, which also suffered from the lack of firearms, came to requisition and use the rifles ordered by the town of Satu Mare.

The documents from the period 1848-1849 indicate rebellions of the population of Satu Mare in about 22 villages. The first who rebelled were those from Moftinu Mic, on 5 April 1848, when they entered by force the estates they considered theirs. From here, the revolt spread also in Sătmărel, Resighea, Ciumești, Sanislău, Valea Vinului, Ardușat, Lipău, Cig, and in other villages south of the Someș River.

The protest movements and the forced occupation of the allodial estates and forests extended around Carei, too, sweeping across the Károlyi domain and rallying the participation of the Romanian, Hungarian and Saxon peasants there. At Craidorolț, armed Swabians attacked the Hungarians and the Romanians. On 28 and 29 April, in Ciumești and Sanislău, Count Károlyi's allodial land was occupied by peasants who pulled out even the bushes that marked the boundaries of the estate, causing a damage of 10,000 florins.⁸ In Homorod, the residents dared graze their animals in the allodial forest without the nobleman's permission.

The authorities' response was prompt. Wishing to suppress the upheaval, they requested their superiors' approval for this. On 25 April, the Minister of Interior authorized the county authorities to use force to quell the protests. However, the populace continued to manifest its dissatisfaction, leading the representatives of Satu Mare County to address the palatine on 3 May 1848, requesting permission to introduce the martial law. On 5 May, the organization of statarial tribunals was approved also for instigators, firebrands, rabble-rousers, etc. As expected, repression followed against the rebellious villages. On 14 May, troops were sent into Sanislău, where 35 people were arrested. In Resighea, 14 people were arrested and sentenced to a month in prison. In Ciumești, 11 persons were arrested, while at Valea Vinului and Lipău, 3 people were sentenced to prison. An inquiry commission traveled to Moftinu Mic, where 75 people were arrested, 13 of which were subsequently released.⁹ Thus, in mid-May 1848, 327 peasants were imprisoned at Carei. Due to the large number of prisoners, the prison management faced a great lack of personnel, requiring that the number of guards be

⁸ Viorel Ciubotă, *Lupta românilor sătmăreni pentru Unire (1918-1919)*, Satu Mare: Ed. Muzeului Sătmărean, 2004, p. 27.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

supplemented by another 8 people. Despite the arrests and the repression of public unrest, the inhabitants of Homorod continued to manifest openly their revolt for over a month after the authorities had annihilated the actions in the other villages.¹⁰

The most relevant information about the atmosphere and riots from Sătmăr in early 1848, as well as about the atmosphere in the prison from Carei comes from the letters sent to *Gazeta de Transilvania* by Moise Sora Novac, “one of the most national Romanians we have in Hungary.” From the letters he addressed to George Barițiu, dated 21 and 26 May 1848, we may find details about the actions organized by the Romanian population in Hurezu Mare Racova, about the accusations brought against it, about the proceedings of the trial conducted against these people and the period of detention. Thus, in the letter dated 21 May 1848, Moise Sora Novac recounted that on 7 May, the villagers in Hurezu wanted to celebrate the day of “common liberty.” In church, the priest (Moise Sora Novac) consecrated “the Hungarian colours” and then they headed for the neighboring village (Racova), carrying with them the consecrated flag and four banners. Along the way, they sang psalms and other religious songs. Arriving at the church in Racova, they attended service, and Moise Sora Novac delivered a sermon in keeping with “this most special celebration.” When the activities in the church came to an end, the locals and invited the inhabitants of Hurezu to a feast. Carried away by the atmosphere of the ensuing party, one of the villagers started firing a gun in the direction of the house where the parish priests from Racova and Hurezu were dining. The fear of a possible house fire caused great panic and pandemonium. Once the people calmed down and the banquet ended, Moise Sora Novac and his parishioners left for Hurezu, in a procession again. Frightened and intrigued by the events (the meeting in Racova, the processions with flags, banners and religious songs), the Swabians informed Count Károlyi György about what had happened in Hurezu and Racova. Following these reports, Moise Sora Novac was sent to prison in Carei, where he was forbidden to speak with the other prisoners or receive outside visitors. Although he was imprisoned on a Wednesday, it was only on the next Sunday that he learned from the “*hodnog* [sub-lieutenant] of the city” that he had been accused of public agitation and disturbance (“agitator, disturber of the peace”).¹¹ The letter dated 26 May 1848 reports that after the start of the trial, it was proved that most of the accusations brought against Moise Sora Novac were unfounded, which is why he was released. One of the accusations referred to the prayer books that Moise Sora Novac had had printed in Latin spelling and then sent to Moldova and Walachia to make the Latin spelling known also in the cultural environments of these regions. The officials accused him of having conspired through these books too in order to foment the Romanians’ rebellion against the Hungarian authorities. During his imprisonment, there were 327 prisoners in Carei, to the astonishment of the author of the letter, who stated that “there have never been so many ever since Sătmăr County was founded, for even at their most numerous, there were only 240.”¹²

¹⁰ Balogh Béla, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹¹ Viorel Ciubotă, Bujor Dulgău, Doru Radosav, *Lupta românilor din județul Satu Mare pentru făurirea statului național unitar român. Documente 1848-1918*, Bucharest: The General Directorate of State Archives of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1989, p. 69.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 71.

Another important aspect to be mentioned here regards the participation of a group of Romanians from Satu Mare in the Assembly of Blaj on 3/15 - 5/17 May 1848. It included Ioan Pop, Archpriest of Sărauad District in Solnocu de Mijloc County (the present-day Satu Mare County) and Demetriu Coroianu from Craidorolț.¹³

After May, until mid-November, the atmosphere in the county of Satu Mare became somewhat calmer. This was also due to the consolidation of the repression forces targeting the actions of rebellion against the authorities. There were, however, numerous cases of no-show before the recruitment commission, especially after August 1848, when the Diet decided to form a regular army, consisting of 200,000 soldiers.

The presence at Năsăud of Colonel Karl Urban, appointed by the emperor in October 1848 as commander of the Army of Northern Transylvania, caused an impressive reaction among the Romanian population of Satu Mare. The newspaper *Korunk* published an article written by Egyed Ákos, "The Antecedents of the Civil War. Urban, the One Who Enforced Vienna's Policy," in which the author referred to the situation above and stated that the imperial representative who had come from Vienna to Năsăud on September 8 was the one who had stirred the spirits of Northern Transylvania, according to Vienna's plan.¹⁴

The opposition that started in Năsăud on 13 September expanded in Solnocul Interior, Dăbâca and then Chioar. The imperial power was represented by two-headed eagle, the insignia of the rioters. In Chioar there started to spread ideas that placed the Hungarian authorities in opposition with the emperor and the Romanians. On 26 September, this agitation turned into a riot. Taking advantage of this situation, on 27 September 1848, Urban summoned the people to an assembly by tolling the bells. The farmers who responded to the call decided to march against the Hungarian army. The riot of the Romanian population prompted the Hungarian officials to take refuge in Baia Mare, Satu Mare and Carei.¹⁵

The movements from Chioar affected the villages inhabited by the Romanians in Satu Mare County. The localities that were involved were those near the Someș and south-west of Baia Mare. True tragedy occurred in Cetățele, Medieș, Românești, and Mocira, which brought about gory retributions.

In September, those who paid homage to the imperial flag in Năsăud included the delegates of the villages Lucăcești (27 September), Hurezu Mare (29 September) and Medieșu Aurit (3 October).¹⁶ On 4 October 1848, Colonel Urban signed a patent for the Romanian delegates from Medieșu Aurit and Românești, confirming that "the people, as envoys of the locality Medieșu Aurit, presented themselves immediately with power of attorney and, by free will, they firmly declared that it was their desire to reinforce their faith and obedience to his Highness, Emperor Ferdinand I, under oath, and that if necessary, they would voluntarily send the youth capable of bearing arms into the army of the imperial and royal Dual Monarchy, under order no. 4450 of 16,

¹³ Bujor Dulgău, "Considerații privind manifestările pășoptiste din zona Sătmăruului," in *Satu Mare-Studii și Comunicări*, XV-XVI, 1998-1999, Satu Mare, Ed. Muzeului Sătmărean, p. 325.

¹⁴ Balogh Béla, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 325.

according to the oath they swore before the imperial and royal flag, which will be confirmed. And, therefore, the military authority rightly claims that the county or other offices, which are also involved in enrolling the recruits, should retain them in the country for peace-keeping.”¹⁷

As stated in the above lines, the uprising of the residents from Medieșu Aurit at the beginning of October was closely connected with Colonel Urban's personality and his presence in Năsăud. Thus, the cattle traders in the above-mentioned locality from Satu Mare brought information from Lăpuș about the Romanians' movement in Chioar and about the existence of an emperor's man in Năsăud. Word got spread that if one resorted to Colonel Urban, one could get a letter granting exemption from recruitment tolls and taxes. They began an active propaganda among the population in Odoreu and Iojib against the payment of taxes and the submission of soldiers. Also, they drafted a letter to Emperor Ferdinand I, whom they offered armed support. Colonel Urban answered this letter in German. Since they were not familiar with this language, the villagers from Medieșu Aurit resorted to the Roman Catholic priest in Iojib. The latter, however, denounced them to the Hungarian authorities. Thus, on 8 October, two companies of soldiers from the national guard came to Medieș to quell the “appalling crime” of the uprising. Armed with whatever they could find in the home, the villagers were ready to face the guards sent to restore peace in the region, but on their arrival they retired quietly. The statarial tribunal inquiry was held in Medieșu Aurit from 16 to 26 October. It led to the imprisonment of 60 peasants, whose property was seized. Ștefan Zima and Dumitru Zab were sentenced to death by hanging. After the surrender from Șiria, in August 1849, the prisoners were freed.¹⁸

The events from November inflamed the spirits again in the county of Satu Mare. Disgruntled by the presence of the imperial troops near Sătmar, the Hungarian authorities instructed Major Katona Miklós to gather the troops in the area, including the national guard in the county, and lead them to Dej.¹⁹ There took place the military confrontation with the Austrian army, which included Romanian border guards. On 23 November, Urban defeated the poorly organized Hungarian troops and advanced up to Șomcuta Mare. The closeness of the imperial army to the border of Satu Mare County sparked panic among a section of the population in Satu Mare. However, Urban decided to halt the advance and stay in Transylvania. In December 1848, he was surrounded by the Hungarian army near Cluj. He managed to break the front line near Apahida and withdrew to the plain area. The danger of Sătmar being occupied by the imperial army was gone.

It was also in November 1848 that 600 Croat prisoners were brought in Satu Mare, which created numerous disputes concerning their imprisonment. They represented the reason why, in February 1848, at the request of Csányi László, the commissioner of the Hungarian revolutionary government, that the authorities of Satu Mare should send soldiers, they refused to do so, arguing that at least two companies were needed for guarding the Croats and, therefore, they could not do without the military support existing

¹⁷ Viorel Ciubotă, Bujor Dulgău, Doru Radosav, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁸ Alexandru Doboși, *Din istoria Sătmarului*, Satu Mare: Ed. Prefectura Județului Satu Mare, 1937, p. 37.

¹⁹ Borovszky Samu, *op cit.*, p. 519.

in the city. Towards the end of the revolutionary actions, the Croat prisoners were released. They received payment for a week and were escorted to Moftin.²⁰

As a conclusion regarding the 1848 revolutionary actions in Satu Mare, it should be noted that they involved the representatives of all the ethnic groups: Romanians, Hungarians and Swabians. Their goals were related, in particular, to the peasant unrest during that period: emancipation from serfdom, the abolition of taxes, the review of the urban regulations that had left the peasants with very little land. What is interesting about Satu Mare is that the events here did not fit the pattern of the 1848 revolutionary movement in Transylvania. The Romanian population here, concentrated only in certain regions, was solely influenced by the ideas propagated in the areas adjacent to the boundaries of Sătmăr. Only in these localities did the uprising movements have a broader, national character. The Hungarian population became aware, in the spring of 1848, of the revolutionary principles and acted according to them. The revolt movements organized on large estates, particularly on the Károlyi domain, comprised not only the Hungarian population, but also the Swabians and the Romanians; these movements had been engendered by the discontent that the new agrarian law, passed by the Diet in Bratislava, had caused. It should be noted that on this estate, the Romanian population lived among the Hungarian and the Swabian communities, being strongly influenced by them. That is why the events from the spring of 1848, in which the Romanians from the Károlyi estate were involved, had a strong social character. This was reinforced by the lack of Romanian elites that might have assumed the role of leaders, supporting and coordinating the Romanians.

²⁰ Alexandru Doboși, *op. cit.*, p. 35.